



**NAPOLEON  
IN SAINT HELENA**

HIS FIGHT  
FOR HIS STORY

**EXHIBITION**

6 April – 24 July 2016

# HISTORICAL TIMELINE 1814-1840

## **APRIL 1814 - FEBRUARY 1815**

EXILE ON ELBA

## **MARCH - JUNE 1815**

THE HUNDRED DAYS

## **JUNE 1815**

WATERLOO AND  
THE ABDICATION

## **JULY - SEPTEMBER 1815**

THREE MONTHS AT SEA

## **OCTOBER - DECEMBER 1815**

SEVEN WEEKS AT BRIARS  
Napoleon spent his first weeks at Briars Pavilion, in the garden of the Balcombe family home. He received many visitors and attempted to persuade Europe to renege on its decision to exile him on the island of Saint Helena.

## **DECEMBER 1815 - APRIL 1816**

MOVE TO LONGWOOD

Controlled by an inflexible etiquette, life at the small court was completely dictated by the Emperor. He received many visitors. More and more clandestine messages were sent to Napoleon.

## **MAY - DECEMBER 1816**

CONFRONTATION  
WITH THE GOVERNOR

The new governor made it clear to Napoleon he was the prisoner of the European powers. Napoleon, insulted, broke all ties with him.

Contacts with the outside world were restricted. Expenditure was closely monitored. Several members of the Emperor's retinue were forcibly sent away.

## **JANUARY 1817 -**

## **JANUARY 1818**

QUARRELS AMONG  
HIS ENTOURAGE

Rivalries between General Gourgaud and the Montholon family created more and more problems for the lives of the captives. Any hope of one day leaving the island diminished. The Emperor's health deteriorated rapidly.

## **FEBRUARY - JULY 1818**

CRISIS AND DESERTION

Rising tensions caused a serious crisis among the members of Napoleon's retinue. The sudden death of Cipriani, his butler and confidant, broke the chain of clandestine correspondence with Europe and deeply affected Napoleon. His health declined even further.

## **AUGUST 1818 -**

## **SEPTEMBER 1819**

DERELICTION

Napoleon turned into a virtual recluse. Since the choice of doctor was a bone of contention between the Emperor and Hudson Lowe, Napoleon went 14 months without regular medical attention. He did his utmost to annoy the governor, notably by hiding himself away from those charged with keeping watch on him.

## **OCTOBER 1819 -**

## **JANUARY 1820**

HOPE

New members arrived to join Napoleon's retinue, including two priests and a new doctor. The Emperor came out of reclusion from his apartments and oversaw the complete overhaul of the gardens. His bedroom and study were redecorated.

## **JULY 1820 - MARCH 1821**

RELAPSE

The Emperor's health deteriorated in spite of several attempts to encourage him out into the fresh air. He shut himself away again in his rooms. The building of New Longwood was completed but the Emperor refused to move out.

## **17 MARCH - 5 MAY 1821**

FINAL DAYS

The Emperor died on 5 May 1821 at 5.49 pm.

## **JULY - DECEMBER 1840**

THE RETURN OF HIS  
ASHES

# EXHIBITION ITINERARY

## SAINT HELENA. THE EMPEROR'S EXILE

### FROM THE ÉLYSÉE PALACE TO SAINT HELENA

Waterloo. 18 June, 1815,  
9.15 pm.

The French army commanded by Napoleon I was defeated by a British force under the orders of the Duke of Wellington, and by Prussian soldiers under Marshal Blücher. The defeated emperor returned to Paris on horseback. Exhausted and discouraged, he reached the Élysée Palace on 21 June, only to be faced with another defeat. Under pressure from the two Chambers of government, he abdicated in favour of his son, then five years old. He suggested that he could become a simple general and defend France from invasion, but

the Provisional Government constituted and gathered around Fouché, ex-Minister of Police, showed him the door and the road to exile. A small entourage was quickly constituted around him. The clothes, table services, and silverware that were packed into boxes for the exile were simply those which fell to hand. Here began the fallen Emperor's long road from Paris to Longwood House, on the island of Saint Helena, passing via Malmaison, the Ile d'Aix, and the English south coast.

### ISLAND PRISON

The European powers considered the fallen Emperor a prisoner. Britain was designated as responsible for his detention, but under the watchful eye of commissioners which Austria, Russia, Prussia, and France were to send. Given that Saint Helena was 2 000 km off the coast of West Africa and 5 600 km east of Buenos Aires, the

island was the perfect choice as far as discouraging escape attempts was concerned. It belonged to the British *East India Company* and was a stopping off point for merchant vessels on their way to the Indies. Defence of the Saint Helena coastline was beefed up with military units added to those already stationed on the island. For the period of Napoleon's detention, the island was to be run by a Lieutenant General answerable directly to the British Minister for the War and the Colonies. Admiral Cockburn was the first incumbent, and he was replaced by Sir Hudson Lowe, who arrived on 14 April, 1816. At the beginning of Napoleon's exile, newspapers and caricaturists gleefully underlined the disparity between the image that Napoleon had carefully constructed for himself (and to which he remained more than ever attached), namely, a limitless ambition, compared to his tiny domain on the island.

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**General view of Saint Helena,**

Print

© Fondation Thiers  
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## LONGWOOD HOUSE, THE FINAL RESIDENCE

As for a place to live, the Governor's residence, Plantation House, was out of the question. For the time that a suitable place was being prepared, Admiral Cockburn installed Napoleon on the domain at the Briars. Napoleon lived there in a small pavilion, kindly cared for by the owners, the Balcombe family. The cheeky behaviour of the youngest daughter, Betsy, brightened slightly Napoleon's melancholy days.

On 10 December, he moved to Longwood Farm, on a barren plain. There, the terrain acted as a brake on the clouds, creating one of the least sunny and most-humid places on the whole island. The weather was most frequently dominated by wind and mist, even in summer. The only view of the sea was rarely clear.

Guard houses were built to control the one road into Longwood. On the leaving the area where he had freedom of movement, Napoleon had to be accompanied by a British officer. He refused. Nor did he go to the Governor's dinners, where his imperial status would not be recognised. As for the horse races, one of the island's principal entertainments, he watched from far off through a telescope.

He allowed the space to close in around him, vicelike.



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### Camp bed used by Napoleon on Saint Helena.

Marie-Jean Desouches  
© Musée national des châteaux  
de Malmaison et Bois-Préau

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## SAINT HELENA. THE ULTIMATE BATTLE

### THE BATTLE AT SAINT HELENA

Living conditions at Longwood, exacerbated by the poor relations with the Governor, were terrible. The setting inspired ennui, the house and resources provided were deliberately threadbare, and the captivity caused disagreements amongst his entourage. Regardless, the Emperor had already decided aboard the *Northumberland* that he would fight for the only thing he had left.

"I want to write about the great things we have done together!" he had said in 1814 to his faithful soldiers as he left for the island of Elba. On Saint Helena, with its ineluctable atmosphere of things falling apart, the past gradually took on a capital importance. The more the space closed in around him, the more time itself became for the Emperor a key battleground.

He organised his life like a military campaign. His entourage became his staff headquarters and imperial guard, and he worked them pitilessly. The British, with Governor Lowe at the head, became the enemy *par excellence*. Everyone, in one way or another, ended up writing their version of the story. History then became the last battlefield. How he would be remembered was to become the final victory.

## THE FINAL HOUR

On Saint Helena, the Emperor was beaten, far from those he loved, reduced to passivity both by his jailers and his own behaviour.

The good times, like those spent at The Briars with the Balcombes in 1815, were past. Occasional moments of enthusiasm drove him to write or garden energetically, but his morale and his health began failing rapidly after 1817. No longer having anything to do, he decided no longer to be.

For Great Britain, and the Governor under government orders, the responsibility for guarding Napoleon cut two ways. Firstly, it was a question of holding firm, preventing escape and any desire to return to the political stage. But it was also important to avoid exposing the country to the accusation of being responsible, even indirectly, for Napoleon's death.

The Emperor realised this dilemma and tried to take his revenge by writing in his will: "I die prematurely, assassinated by the English oligarchy and its assassin [Lowe]. The English nation will not be slow in avenging me."

## A BARE TOMBSTONE IN THE SANE VALLEY

On the road from Jamestown, along the crater of the Devil's Punch Bowl, sits a verdant valley. Napoleon discovered it on one of his excursions and particularly enjoyed the spring water there. It was here that he wished to be buried, well aware that he could not be buried on French soil. On 6 May, 1821, a tomb was dug in shade of two willow trees. After the autopsy, performed by Dr Antommarchi, the Emperor's body was laid out in the bed chamber, which thereby became a chapel of rest. On 9 May, the funeral cortège left Longwood. The British gave Napoleon the honours due to a General. The Emperor's body was laid to rest in four nesting coffins – one of tin, another of exotic wood, one of lead and a final coffin of teak. The tomb was covered with three flag stones taken from the kitchen in *New House*. The French wanted to have the words "Napoléon. Né à Ajaccio le 15 août 1769, mort à Sainte-Hélène le 5 mai 1821", (Napoleon. Born in Ajaccio on 15 August, 1769, died on Saint Helena, 5 May, 1821) inscribed on the stone, but the Governor wished to have the name *Bonaparte* added to this. No compromise was reached for this the last manifestation of the conflict that had characterised the exile. The tombstone was left bare.



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***Napoleon I on his death bed, one hour before his burial.***

1843

Jean-Baptiste Mauzaisse  
© Musée national des châteaux  
de Malmaison et Bois-Préau  
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## AFTER SAINT HELENA. FROM SHADOW TO LIGHT

### THE FINAL VICTORY

On 27 May, 1821, the Bertrand family, Montholon, Dr Antommarchi, Abbé Vignali, and the servants Marchand, Ali, Coursot, and Archambault embarked for Europe. They left in their wake Longwood and the British and Chinese furniture, which the island notables shared out between them. The very same who in 1815 had provided Napoleon with the furniture they no longer wanted.

Though the last of his faithful companions were forced to leave the Emperor's body behind them, they nevertheless took with them the manuscripts of his memoirs, his will, his death mask, and dozens of objects marked by his presence, not to mention their own remembrances.

The final phase of the battle took place far from Saint Helena, though the island was to remain central to the argument. Later, these witnesses of the exile proclaimed tirelessly far and wide not only the history of his reign as Napoleon himself had written it, but also the tribulations of the final years. In this way, by attempting to complete the story, they in the end changed quite considerably the way contemporaries and

future generations would remember Napoleon I.

### LEAVING SAINT HELENA

Even beyond the grave, Napoleon continued to have an influence on political life. Some wished his name to be erased from history; others wanted to honour him. In 1840, King Louis-Philippe I attempted a gesture of national unity. With British agreement, he sent his son, the Prince de Joinville, to Saint Helena, to bring back the illustrious corpse. After some hesitation, the Hôtel des Invalides was chosen as the final resting place.

The members of the expedition were for the most part those who had shared Napoleon's exile: Bertrand and his son, Arthur, Gourgaud, Las Cases' son, Marchand, and Ali, to name but the best known. On 15 October, 1840, in driving rain, the tomb and then the four coffins were opened.

The body appeared perfectly preserved. It was an intensely emotional experience. The parts of the teak coffin were handed out to those present. A new lead coffin was used in its place, and this was nested in an ebony sarcophagus.

On their arrival at Cherbourg, the mortal remains were borne up the river Seine. Paris received them on 10 December. The sarcophagus was initially displayed in a chapel in the Dôme des Invalides until it was transferred to the monumental crypt in 1861.

### THE ROCK OF DESTINY

In July 1821, Europe learned of the death of Napoleon on Saint Helena. Though unconfirmed, the news of his death in the bosom of the church moved his critics. Amongst them, the poet Alphonse de Lamartine concluded: "His coffin is sealed! God has judged him! Silence!".

At Longwood, the Emperor staged his demise carefully, even going so far as to explain to the Comte de Montholon: "If Jesus Christ has not died on the cross, he would not have been God." After his death, eyewitness accounts completed this metamorphosis. Locks of hair, leaves from the willows over the tomb, and the mementos that his faithful attendants distributed became relics of a new cult. Death in exile on an island was compared to hell; Napoleon came back transfigured.

"You tower over our epoch. Angel or demon? Of no importance!" said Victor Hugo of Napoleon. For the children of this century that followed the Enlightenment, Napoleon became a hero of mythology. Saint Helena at this point became the rock on which Prometheus, the Titan, was chained and eternally tortured by the eagle of Zeus for having brought fire to mankind. The real shape of island disappeared behind the symbol.



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**The Future of Statues**

René Magritte, sculpture. 1932.  
© Lehmbruck Museum  
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## EXHIBITION

### EXHIBITION CURATORS

**Emilie Robbe**, Head curator and head of the Modern Department at the Musée de l'Armée

**Michel Dancoisne-Martineau** Honorary Consul of France, Director of the National Estates of Saint Helena

### PROJECT MANAGEMENT

**Exhibition and lighting design**  
Vincen Cornu Architecture

**Graphic design**  
Villar+Vera

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## AROUND THE EXHIBITION

**Adults guided tours:**  
benedict@cultival.fr  
+ 33 (0)825 05 44 05

**Young audience guided tours:**  
aiming to families and school students. Ask more information about the tour itself, to organize a birthday party ...

Tours schedule online

**Information and booking:**  
jeunes@musee-armee.fr

Colloquium  
*Waterloo Meetings*  
24 March 2016

Conferences  
*The Eagle On The Island*  
From 19 to 30 May 2016

Concerts  
*The Napoleonic Legend  
In Music*  
From 7 April  
to 20 June 2016

Cinema  
*A Caged Eagle*  
3 and 10 June 2016

Find all the latest information about the exhibition programme and events on **musee-armee.fr** or on **the museum app**.

## INFORMATION

### TICKETS

8.5€ exhibition  
12 € exhibition and permanent collections  
Free under 18

### GROUPS

7.5€ exhibition  
(as of 10 pers., booking only)  
**groupes@musee-armee.fr**

**Buy your ticket online**  
**musee-armee.fr**

### SERVICES

Gift store and book-shop  
Café – Restaurant  
*Le Carré des Invalides*  
Open every day

## competition

# IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF NAPOLEON IN SAINT HELENA

Play and try to win an exceptional trip to Saint Helena island by answering the following three questions on the tablet at the exit of the exhibition :

### What is the name of Napoleon's jailer in Saint Helena ?

- Hudson Lowe
- Barry O'Meara
- Rear Admiral Cockburn

### What is the name of the ship aboard which Napoleon went to Saint Helena?

- HMS *Bellerophon*
- HMS *Northumberland*
- *La Belle-Poule*

### How many candles can you count on the chandelier of the salon ?

- Ten
- Eleven
- Twelve

### WHAT CAN YOU WIN ?

A one week trip to Saint Helena island, flights and accommodation included\*.

\*For the complete terms and conditions, see at the entrance of the exhibition, and online at [musee-armee.fr/ExpoNapoleonSainteHelene/](http://musee-armee.fr/ExpoNapoleonSainteHelene/).



Competition organised with the generous support of Saint Helena tourism office.

#### OPENING TIMES

Everyday but 1<sup>st</sup> May  
From 10 am to 6 pm  
Late openings on Tuesday, until 9 pm

#### Musée de l'Armée

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